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ABSTRACT

Slippery Rock University's tutor training program, "Learning Together: An Interactive Approach to Tutor Training," was instituted in January 1983 to prepare newly hired tutors to provide academic and study skills assistance to regularly admitted and academically underprepared students. The program, funded jointly by a state Act 101 grant for educationally and economically disadvantaged students and the institution, is 8.5 hours long and consists of 4 components--a 5-hour orientation, and 3 workshops on communication skills, study skills, and tutoring problems, respectively. The format of each component is activity-based in that trainees brainstorm, share personal experiences, integrate and synthesize new material, or role-play to discover and reaffirm the philosophy and strategies of effective tutoring. Peer tutors award high ratings to the training program. Positive student evaluations of the Tutoring Center as well as continued growth in student use over a 10-year period also suggest that the training program is effective in preparing staff to meet student needs. The program may be replicated at other institutions; training materials are available from Slippery Rock University's Tutoring Center. Contains nine references. (Author)

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## AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

**Abstract**

Slippery Rock University's tutor training program, "Learning Together: An Interactive Approach to Tutor Training," was instituted in January 1983 to prepare newly hired tutors to provide academic and study skills assistance to regularly admitted and academically underprepared students. The program, funded jointly by a state Act 101 grant for educationally and economically disadvantaged students and the institution, is eight and one-half hours long and consists of four components--an orientation and workshops on communication skills, study skills, and tutoring problems. The format of each component is activity-based wherein trainees brainstorm, share personal experiences, integrate and synthesize new material, or role-play to discover and reaffirm the philosophy and strategies of effective tutoring. Peer tutors award high ratings to the training program. Positive student evaluations of the Tutoring Center as well as continued growth in student use over a ten year period also suggest that the training program is effective in preparing a staff to meet students' needs. The program may be replicated at other institutions; training materials are available from Slippery Rock University's Tutoring Center.

## Introduction

Peer tutoring programs now pervade our educational systems, their proliferation attesting in some part to their success. Elements that contribute to the success of such programs include institutional commitment; a skilled, knowledgeable, and respected program director; adequate funding; attractive facilities that can accommodate most students who use the program; and a well-developed training program for the student staff. It is the latter that is the focus of this report.

Most professionals in higher education who are responsible for developing and administering peer tutoring programs recognize that simply placing two students together, one of whom has demonstrated better academic achievement, will not guarantee that effective tutoring will occur (Niedermeyer, 1970; Reed, 1974; Whitman, 1988). In particular, potential tutors need to be disabused of the assumption that peer tutoring is the same as classroom teaching and guided to understand and fulfill their role as a collaborator in a learning context whose value lies in its distinction from the traditional classroom setting. Tutor training programs, aimed at developing informed and sensitive paraprofessionals, take on a variety of forms that may be classified as either formal academic, credit-bearing courses or less formal, non-credit bearing seminars. Whitman (1988) briefly describes several models in each format, most of which include discussions of tutors' roles and responsibilities, interpersonal communication skills, and study skills. The tutor training program at Slippery Rock University--"Learning Together: An Interactive Approach to Tutor Training" falls into the category of less formal, non-credit bearing programs. The description that follows will focus on the components of the eight and one-half -hour training program which includes an orientation and workshops on communication skills, study skills, and responding to tutoring problems, the latter centered on a director/tutor generated video-tape.

## Background

The Tutoring Center at Slippery Rock University is located in the Academic Support Services Department which administers programs to serve the needs of academically underprepared students. Initially, the department offered peer tutoring, supported by funding from Act 101 legislation in Pennsylvania, to a specially designated population of educationally and economically disadvantaged students. However, after receiving many requests for tutoring help from students in the at-large population, the department, supported by university administration, recognized the need for a centralized, campus-wide service and instituted a formal peer tutoring program in the Fall of 1978. Funding for the service now included an institutional match.

Initially, the program was run by two graduate assistants supervised by one of the department faculty members. The graduate assistants developed a scheduling process and record-keeping system and began to organize communication workshops to help tutors work more effectively with their students. As the tutoring program drew increasing numbers of students, the university supported the department's decision that its operation required the services of a full-time professional who could further develop the Tutoring Center by creating and instituting a regular tutor training program, increasing the service's credibility and visibility, and establishing a positive working relationship with the faculty. The director of the Tutoring Center, whose position is funded by Act 101 and Slippery Rock University, was hired in the Fall of 1981. During the 1990-91 academic year, the Tutoring Center responded to over 2,000 requests for peer tutoring assistance.

The director, whose background is a Ph.D. in Englsih and a Master of Science in Counseling, developed the tutor training program, "Learning Together: An Interactive Approach to Tutor Training," over a period of two years, building a model grounded in small group inteaction and the principles of collaborative learning. The training program, mandatory for all new tutors and invitational to experienced tutors, is conducted once at the beginning of each semester.

## Description

The training program, directed at students newly hired to work as tutors, focuses on assisting them to develop a paraprofessional identity, including a familiarity with and sensitivity to diversity in communication styles, study skills strategies, and students' varied learning needs. Four components comprise the eight and one-half hour tutor training program, attended by approximately 25 to 30 students each semester: a five-hour orientation, a one and one-quarter hour session on communication skills, a one session on study skills, and a one and one quarter hour session on how to respond to tutoring problems. The Tutorial Coordinator conducts each of the workshops which deliberately requirs the participants to draw on personal experiences, brainstorm and share ideas and feelings with each other, and solve problems together. Peer tutors are paid minimum wage ($4.25) for participation in the training program. Consequently, training a group of thirty tutors each semester (approximate total of 510 hours) would require approximately $2200.00 annually. A short description of each session follows.

Orientation

It is appropriate to begin any group activity with a low-anxiety, non-threatening opportunity for participants to introduce and share relevant information about themselves. Pfeiffer and Jones (1974) offer a plethora of ice-breaking activities. One such activity that works well to begin an orientation session directs members of self-selected dyads to introduce themselves and answer group-generated questions, some of which may relate to tutoring, and then requires dyad members introduce each other to the large group when reassembled (Jones & Pfeiffer, 1973).

An orientation is a prime opportunity to clarify for new tutors the policies and procedures that they will be expected to follow as paraprofessionals. Placing a review of these items early in the agenda for the orientation highlight their importance. Although the form may vary from institution to institution, at Slippery Rock University, a folder of information is provided each trainee. The folder includes an organizational chart; statements of goals, policies, and procedures;

sample tutor request forms, progress reports, student evaluations, and payroll forms; and guides on study skills and tutoring strategies. A didactic review of these materials is the most efficient method of familiarizing the new staff with them.

Following this review, the tutor training program at Slippery Rock University invites the chair of the Academic Support Services Department to discuss with the new tutors the special population of academically underprepared students that they will encounter and for whom they will need to complete progress reports. This contact solidifies the staff's understanding of their connection to an academic department as well as acquaints them with one member of the audience for their progress reports. This presentation and question and answer period concludes the three hour morning segment of the orientation.

The activities comprising the remaining two hours of the orientation are more representative of the interctive nature of "Learning Together." The first activity aims at helping the trainees build a sense of their responsibilities and role as well as their limitations. The large group is split into five or six smaller groups of five and asked to identify a recorder and a spokesperson. Each group is given a large sheet of newsprint and a magic marker and the following directions:

> Saving some room at the top of the sheet, split the remainder into two columns, one designated "Tutor's Responsibilities," the other "Tutee's Responsibilities." Given what you know about helping others and yourself to learn and expectations stated so far regarding your perfomance as a tutor in the Tutoring Center, compile a list of what you imagine that you will have to do in order to be an effective, helpful tutor. Then, compile a similar list of what tutees will need to do to allow you to be an effective tutor. Also, before or after completing these two lists, at the top of the sheet, complete the fragment, "A tutor is . . ." as a metaphor.

Trainees are allowed fifteen to twenty minutes to complete this task. During this time, new tutors discuss their learning experiences and their experiences helping others and begin to abstract from them more general responsibilities. The importance of the interpersonal relationship to nurturing academic growth becomes a focus as they discuss self-esteem, motivation, and patience. Experienced tutors in the group facilitate the discussion by adding insights developed on the job.

Looking at responsibilities from the tutee's perspective leads new tutors to appreciate the collaborative dimension essential to a successful tutoring relationship. Also their conception of the tutor's role becomes more sharply defined as they recognize that tutees have responsibilities that they must fulfill to allow tutoring to be helpful.

Each group is then asked to post its lists and metaphor, and the spokesperson discusses the group's conclusions. The lists overlap to a large degree, the written and oral repetition effectively emphasizing important concepts. As each group presents its list, The Tutorial Coordinator may correct, modify, or expand the group's ideas.

Some of the metaphors produced by this activity include, "A Tutor is a Crutch, Not a Wheelchair," "A Tutor is a Blank Check Waiting to be Endorsed," "A Tutor is a Cheerleader on the Sideline of Education," and dubiously "A Tutor is Fertilizer on the Garden of Knowledge." The most creative methaphor becomes featured on a button provided to the tutoring staff and other university personnel, serving as excellent public relations for the tutoring program.

The newprint texts are displayed on the Tutoring Center walls throughout the semester, easily readable reminders to tutors and tutees of the roles each must play for peer tutoring to be an effective support strategy.

The final activity for the orientation asks the small groups constructed for the previous activity to consider and brainstorm answers to two questions: First, what information do tutors need to obtain from students during the first tutoring session, and second, what information does the tutor need to share with tutees to lay the ground work for a successfultutoring relationship. When the groups have finished, each reports their results to the Tutorial Coordinator, who lists the responses on a black board, supplementing the final lists if necessary. Trainees are then invited to role-play the first ten minutes of an initial tutoring session, sharing and requesting the kinds of information designated as important by the small groups. The role-play participants discuss the

experience and the large group offers positive and critical feedback. The role-play may be repeated as often as the coordinator feels is necessary for the new tutors to feel comfortable with this format; the coordinator also may participate as tutor or tutee in a demonstration role-play.

Communication Skills

The second tutor training workshop, an hour and one-quarter long session, focuses on communication skills. The goals of the workshop include sensitizing new tutors to their own as well as their students non-verbal communication, helping them identify their communication style and its implication for effective tutoring, and introducing them to an empathic communication style that reflects active listening.

To accomplish the first goal, the trainees participate in a fishbowl activity on non-verbal communication proposed by Pfeiffer and Jones (1975). The Tutorial Coordinator may preface this activity with a brief explication of both the ambiguity and power of non-verbal communication. The activity requires two volunteers, one playing the role of the tutor, the other the role of the tutee, to adopt a variety of stances regarding eye contact, seating arrangement, and body posture and then asks them to comment on the implications that each scenario has for the tutoring relationaship. Members of the large group also are invited to consider the messages that the tutor and, alternately, the tutee send through their non-verbal behavior. The Tutorial Coordinator concludes the activity by summarizing the non-verbal factors to which tutors must be sensitive because of the impact they may have on the effectiveness of the tutoring session.

To explore communication styles and their impact on the tutoring relationship, new tutors next are asked to complete a questionnaire on response styles adapted from an instrument appearing in Johnson's (1972) Reaching Out: Interpersonal Effectiveness and Self-Actualization. The questionnaire consists of ten items, each a statement that a tutee potentially could make in a tutoring session, followed by five responses that a tutor potentially could make in return. Each of

the choices available to the tutor reflect one of five response styles--**evaluative**, **interpretive**, **supportive**, **probing**, and **understanding**. Trainees are asked to select the response that they would most likely make. Upon completion, they tally their results and, using a key, determine their predominant communication style. Trainees are also given a definition of each of the response modes. At this time, the Tutorial Coordinator may split the large group into five or six small groups and assign one response mode to each group, asking the members to discuss both the advantages and disadvantages of their assigned response style in the context of a tutoring session. Each group summarizes its discussion for the other groups. The Tutorial Coordinator may note that all response styles have strengths and weaknesses in promoting effective communication within the tutoring session; however, according to psychologist Carl Rogers, the response style that is most effective in establishing an open trusting relationship is the one least characteristic of most communicators--the **understanding** response which requires active listening.

The Tutorial Coordinator discusses the merits of the empathic **understanding** response and the difficulties in exercising active listening. To demonstrate the latter, she asks a group to volunteer to discuss a controversial subject of their choice, the rule being that before any member can respond to another's statemen., s/he must first offer an **understanding** response, which, in essence, accurately paraphrases the preceding speaker's statement. The discussion that emerges is halting and humorous as participants mis-paraphrase one another, forget what the preceding speaker said, or try to slough off thge requirement of responding empathically by saying, "I know what you mean, but . . ." The Tutorial Coordinator also may participate in the discussion to role-model how to give appropriate understanding resposnes.

The participants are asked to discuss the difficulties of responding empathically as well as the experience of receiving empathic responses. For the former, most admit that they were too

focused on formulating their own opinion rather than listening to the speaker's idea, and for the latter, they find themselves either surprised and gratified at having been accurately heard or prepared to clarify further if the responder inaccurately paraphrased their remarks. The Tutorial Coordinator concludes the activity by emphasizing the value of active listening, despite its difficulty, in communication in general, but particularly in initial tutoring sessions to lay the foundation for open, non-judgemental, and accurate communication.

Study Skills

This hour long workshop gives new tutors an opportunity to diagnose the study skills difficulties that tutees may be experiencing, to identify learning strategies that have worked successfully for them, and to familiarize themselves with study skills materials available in the Tutoring Center. Once again, the Tutorial Coordinator splits the large group into five or six smaller groups and distributes a hand-out that contains three short case studies each reflecting a particular study skills problem. The case studies for this workshop were developed by the Tutorial Coordinator; however, an excellent selection of already prepared cases is available in Moore and Poppino (1983) and Maxwell (1990).

The Tutorial Coordinator assigns one scenario to each group. Given the number of small groups and the number of scenarios, there may be more than one group working on any one case study. Trainees are asked to determine what the predominant study skills problem is for their particular case and then prepare a list of suggestions including activities that they woud offer to the tutee experiencing the difficulty. Their lists should be drawn from two sources: their personal experience and appropriate literature selected from a Study Skills Information Center, a multi-tiered stand located in the Tutoring Center, featuring booklets and hand-outs on time-management, effective reading, test-taking, and general study skills strategies which have been produced in-house or purchased commercially (e.g., Association of American Publishers, Inc., 220 E. 23rd St.

New York, NY 10010).

The perusal of material, brainstorming, and compiling of lists takes approximately fifteen to twenty minutes after which the Tutorial Coordinator asks that one individual from each group discuss the members' conclusions, including the diagnosis of the learning problem and suggestions for strategies selected from personal experience as well as from materials selected from the Study Skills Information Center. Additional suggestions are sought from any other group assigned the same scenario and then from anyone else in the gorup at large who has developed an especially effective strategy to overcome the problem.

The Tutorial Coordinator can guide the discussion through her questions and also supplement the presentations with her own knowledge of successful study skills strategies. New tutors leave this workshop having identified effective personal learning strategies, having discovered a valuable resource center for their work with students, and having developed an alertness to weaknesses in students' learning process that may be interfering with their ability to achieve.

Difficult Tutoring Sessions

The last workshop comprising the training program "Learning Together: An Interactive Approach to Tutor Training" is build around a video-tape, featuring seven tutor-tutee scenarios in which the tutoring session is not proceeding satisfactorally. The vidoe-tape, produced in-house by the Tutorial Coordinator and several tutors (a staff professional development activity in itself), reflects tutoring session difficulties that might be characterized as the following: 1) BLOCKING in which the tutee feels that his/her ability to learn is hopeless; 2) CONFUSION in which the tutee is disorganized, baffled, and feeling helpless about the class; 3) MIRACLE SEEKING in which the tutee is enthusiastic about being with the tutor, has high expectations for the outcome, but is passive in the actual tutoring process; 4) OVERENTHUSIASM in which the tutee has high expectations but limited time to accomplish goals; 5) RESISTING in which the tutee may seem

sullen, bored, hostile, disinterested or defensive about the class and his/her ability; 6) PASSIVITY in which the tutee is inattentive and uninvolved; and 7) EVASION in which the tutee attempts to manipulate the tutor away from the subject matter at hand. In each scenario, the tutor deliberately plays an ineffectual role to allow the audience to develop strategies to respond effectively to the situation.

To organize this activity, the Tutorial Coordinator splits the group into five or six small groups, and, after playing each five to six minute segment, stops the tape and asks each group to respond to two questions: first, how would they characterize the tutee's behavior, and second, how would they intervene to transform the session into a more productive one. The Tutorial Coordinator allows the groups several minutes to formulate their thoughts and then asks that a spokesperson from each group report on the group's deliberations. The first group that responds has the opportunity to present the most complete analysis though each of the other groups is also asked to supplement from their perspective. For each new scenario, therefore, a different group is asked to take the the responsibility for the initial response. The Tutorial Coordinator also, of course, may suggest strategies that tutors might want to consider to rspond effectively to the problem.

This activity gives new tutors an opportunity to rehearse their role as a tutor before having actually met with a tutee as well as an opportunity to synthesize and apply the tutoring philosophy skills learned in earlier workshops. They are able to speculate freely about what they see and how they migh respond in a context that is supportive of risk-taking and discovery. And they continue the process of learning from each other, recognizing and respecting their peers as valuable resources for the valuable process in which they are about to engage.

## Results

Each semester, the Tutoring Center solicits two kinds of evaluations of its services--one from the peer tutoring staff and another from the students who have used the program. The first evaluation is a 19 item questionnaire. For items 1 through 17, tutors are asked to assign a rating of *unsatisfactory*, *satisfactory*, *good*, or *not applicable*. The last two items are open-ended questions regarding the effectiveness of the tutoring program. Items one through five specifically ask tutors to evaluate the effectiveness of the components of the training program. Looking at the results of the evaluations by tutors who attended the training sessions from the 1989-90 academic year, we find the following: 80% ranked the tutor orientation overall as *good*, 20% as *satisfactory*; 79% ranked the small group definition of tutor/tutee roles and responsibilities as *good*, 21% as *satisfactory*; 71% ranked the communications skills workshop as *good*, 29% as *satisfactory*; 71% ranked the study skills workshop as *good*, 29% as *satisfactory*; and 75% ranked the video-taped "Difficult Tutoring Situations" as *good*, 25% as *satisfactory*. These results are representative of each year's evaluations.

In addition to the numerical ratings, tutors are also given space to record comments on each item. A sample of their comments regarding components of the tutor training program include:

- "I learned some interesting speaking skills."
- "It really helped me encountering properly some of the situations during tutoring."
- "It was an excellent way of getting the new tutors prepared."
- "It was a good way to get acquainted with fellow tutors, too!"
- "Excellent opportunity to open up and share ideas."
- "Gave good tips to establish communication with tutee."
- "All the skills sessions help prepare for what to expect and do."

The peer tutoring staff clearly finds the training program relevant to their needs and effective in preparing them to take on their new roles as paraprofessionals.

Although the students who use the Tutoring Center do not participate in the tutor training program, their use of the services and their responses on an annual semester evaluation also reflect, in some measure, the effectiveness of the tutor training program. Over a ten year period, Tutoring Center use has increased by 127%. The percentage of students who return from having requested peer tutoring help in the Fall semester to request help in the Spring semester ranges between 46 and 49 percent. And student evaluations of the Center are invariably high.

The student evaluation consists of eleven items to be rated on a Likert-type scale from one as low to six as high. The items are statements about the effectiveness of the tutoring program such as, "Tutoring helped me better understand the course content," "Tutoring helped me become more confident in my ability to succeed in the course," and The tutor was patient." Consistently, all items on the evaluation receive averages between five and six, the top of the scale. Item twelve simply asks "Would you use the Tutoring Center again if you needed academic help?" Out of the 150 to 200 evaluations that are returned each semester, 100 percent respond **yes** to this question.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The tutor training program at Slippery Rock University, "Learning Together: An Interactive Approace to Tutor Training," effectively transforms good students into good tutors who are able to provide academic and study skills assistance that students find valuable. The training program is one that emphasizes the discovery of tutoring principles and strategies through collaboration and interaction with peers, the framework from which effective tutoring proceeds. The program is eminently transferable to other institutions, and in fact, has been reproduced upon request at another institution. Institutions wishing to implement this program can create their own materials, using the sources identified in the program description, although Slippery Rock University samples are available at request. They may need to purchase inexpensive study skills materials or create them for the tutoring staff and, possibly, for general student use. With the asssistance of a Media Services center, the director of a Tutoring Center can create his/her own training video-tape, although Slippery Rock University's version is available upon written request accompanied by a blank tape.

Evaluations suggest that the current components of the program remain unchanged; however, additional training sessions--one in learning styles, another in goal-setting for students--might be of additional help to tutors. Finding a common time for thirty individuals with diverse schedules (currently, the training program is conducted on a Sunday and three additional Common Hours, one and one-quarter hour blocks of time on Tuesdays and Thursdays during which classes are not scheduled in the first week and one-half of classes before tutors begin to schedule appointments with tutees) to meet for addtional training workshops is an obstacle as could be additional funding to accommodate the additional total of 90 hours for a group of 30 (assumes three additional hours of training). But with proper planning, neither is insurmountable. Certainly the additional confidence and strategies that would be imparted by such training could only contribute further to the high job satisfaction that Slippery Rock University tutors already evince

and the high level of satisfaction with The Tutoring Center reported by students.

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